

Weight loss helps couple find freedom and happiness

by Peter Rowe

In photos from September 2005, Jessica and Jon Mize are smiling. That's no surprise, as the camera caught the couple on vacation. Seeing the sights. In San Francisco.

Fun, right? Wrong.

LOST AND FOUND - Traveling light: Jessica and Jon Mize land in San Diego after visiting Jon's hometown. Some didn't recognize them; they are much slimmer. CNS Photo by Nelvin C. Cepeda. THICK AND THIN - In 2005, Jon weighed 303 pounds. Before his trip to Michigan this June, he tipped the scales at 156 pounds. In 2005, Jessica weighed 288 pounds. She found travel more pleasant at her new weight, 177, but plans to lose more. CNS Photo by Nelvin C. Cepeda. "We were both very overweight and very uncomfortable," said Jessica. "Navigating the hills of San Francisco is not a fun thing when you are 100-plus pounds overweight. It royally sucked."

At the time, Jessica was 31, 5-foot-7 and 288 pounds. Jon was 34, 5-foot-8 and 303. Both wanted to lose weight. But how?

Jon insisted that he needed a plan, something clear and structured. Jessica, though, was a disillusioned veteran of Jenny Craig and the Atkins diet. She was fed up with magic formulas "where you eat five grapefruit and then a bowl of chili. I hate the diet industry." She craved freedom, variety, common sense.

After that ill-fated trip to San Francisco, Jessica ran into an old friend who had undergone a dramatic transformation, from pudgy to svelte. Acting on this friend's recommendation, the Mizes enrolled in Weight Watchers.

For the Mizes, this program appears to have been a good fit. By this June, Jessica had shed 111 pounds,

dropping to 177. She plans to lose another 25 to 30 pounds. Jon, though, already had reached his goal, weighing in at 156 pounds.

For years, both Jessica and Jon had struggled with weight, diet and self-esteem. By the age of 12, Jon was already pushing the bathroom scale past 200. On the couple's 2001 honeymoon, an Alaskan cruise, they had to forgo one of the trip's highlights. A helicopter trip over a glacier was off-limits to the couple - unless they paid for two extra seats.

"That was just very sad for us, very embarrassing," Jessica said. "We couldn't do what we wanted to do."

Travel was often painful. On flights, the Mizes had to request extensions so seat belts could pass over their midribs. That had changed by June, though, when the couple flew from San Diego to Detroit to attend a surprise 60th birthday party for Jon's mother.

"The seat belt" - a regulation-sized one - "was enormous! We were both so excited!" Jessica said.

The family reunion in Eastpointe, Mich., was also a thrill. Jon happily revisited people and places he had left nine years ago, when he moved to San Diego. Kay Mize was surprised by the party - and by her son's appearance.

"Jon is skinnier now than he's ever been," Jessica said. "People do the whole double-take. It was very cool."

The Mizes expected some of the stunned reactions to their newly trim status, but they were surprised by other newfound joys. Jon used to hate shopping for clothes. Garments in ordinary shops were too small; at the "Big and Tall" emporiums, everything was fashioned for customers who towered over this relatively short

man.

"I was stuck in this limbo," he said. "Now, for the first time, I can go into any store that I want to and buy anything that I want to, and that's great."

Simple activities, like walking on the beach or hiking in the mountains, have taken on fresh appeal. The Mizes enrolled in a yoga class together.

They also attend weekly Weight Watcher meetings together, where both are buoyed by the support of fellow dieters. These regular gatherings also fill Jon's need for structure. The program's point system, whereby foods are evaluated so dieters can choose from a wide range of dishes, gives Jessica the choices she desired.

"Every Sunday, we figure out our game plan for food for the week and go shopping," Jessica said. "This is sustainable; this really fits in our lifestyle. We go out to dinner every weekend, Saturday and Sunday, and you can do that. We just modify what we eat.

"It's not like you are these nutty diet people who only eat lettuce and tomatoes."

While not nutty, the Mizes are different. During their vacation in Michigan, they caught up with family, friends and former colleagues - and baffled at least one of the latter when Jon returned to a former workplace.

"My old boss didn't recognize me," Jon said. "He walked past several times, and each time I waved. He didn't know who I was - and I had worked for him for 10 years."

But that was nine years and 147 pounds ago.

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